



NEWSLETTER

Volume 5 Issue 1

April 2010

Do you have something you want to say about your group?

We are happy to try to publicise it for you - send to the Clerk or Chairman or via our web site.

Dates for your diary 2010

<i>Annual Parish Meeting (Assembly)</i>	<i>12th April</i>
<i>Planning Meeting Youth Centre</i>	<i>6th May</i>
<i>Parish Council Meeting Robertsbridge Hall</i>	<i>10th May</i>
<i>Planning Meeting Youth Centre</i>	<i>3rd June</i>
<i>Planning Meeting Youth Centre</i>	<i>1st July</i>
<i>Parish Council Meeting Robertsbridge Hall</i>	<i>19th July</i>
<i>Planning Meeting</i>	<i>5th</i>
<i>Planning Meeting Youth Centre</i>	<i>2nd September</i>

All meetings start at 7.30 pm and a period of up to 15 minutes is allowed at the start of the meeting for public comment or questions if required.

Agendas for meetings are posted on the parish notice boards and web site at least 3 days before the meeting—planning applications are available for inspection at the parish office during normal opening times or on the Rother District Council web site - www.rother.gov.uk and you can comment on planning applications on-line



Snow, Floods (nearly) - we have had another bad winter and, at the time of writing it seems not to be entirely over but there are at last some signs of spring.

There have been many difficulties for residents throughout this time not least with the problems caused

by icy roads and footpaths and not surprisingly there have been many requests for more grit bins in the village but this is not as simple as it may appear. Roads are the responsibility of ESCC Highways and they concentrate on main routes both outside and within the village. At one time they installed grit bins at various strategic points, we currently have some 10 bins around the parish which they have kept filled to the best of their ability, but they are often frustrated by residents taking the grit intended for roads and pavements to keep their personal drives clear. Partly for this reason and shortage of resources, Highways will no longer provide new bins.

The parish council has no powers to install bins without Highways approval but we can pay for new bins Of course, the money has to come from somewhere and that means your Council Tax so we have reluctantly decided to increase the Precept for this coming year to provide bins in Salehurst (outside the church), Andrews Close, Fayre Meadow, Willow Bank, Mill Rise and Glenleigh Walk providing we can get Highways approval and find suitable space. .

The Council has no staff to spread the grit if needed and this will be down to self-help by residents but many showed their willingness to help during the latest problems. Also, we hope that residents will not misappropriate the supplies for their own use. Bags of pre-packed grit can be bought from Culverwell's or Builder Centre etc for that purpose but obviously it is best to buy in the summer or autumn and keep to hand and not wait until the bad weather comes!

One of the nice things that came out of the bad weather was to see so many people out and about in the village, using the local shops and helping out neighbours who couldn't get about - it's the community spirit that makes our village a good place to live. Thanks too, to our milkmen, postmen and women and all the other service people who did their best to keep things moving and, not least to the Environment Agency staff who were on duty 24/7 at the end of February when flooding seemed imminent.

Summer Events - Watch out for more details of the Summer Ball on June 26th - tickets on sale in the Spring.

For full details of all events visit the web site www.robertsbridgesummerevent.co.uk

The Status and Role of the Parish Council and Clerk

There is apparently still some misunderstanding about the role and status of the parish council; some residents, particularly perhaps those from an urban background where parishes don't usually exist, are unsure of the position and role of the parish council and there are those who still think it "is something to do with the church!" – this, despite the final separation of Church and State in Civil matters in 1884! So it seems a good time to clarify the Status and Role of the Council, Chairman and Clerk.

The Parish Council is the first tier of elected Local Government and our parish has 9 Councillors, all of whom are unpaid and elected on a 4- yearly cycle. The Parish Clerk is appointed by the Council and is a paid part-time position. In law, the council is a single corporate body and has a legal existence separate from that of its members. The decisions it takes are the responsibility of the council as a whole. Individual councillors contribute to the work of the whole council, but **no** individual councillor (including the Chairman) can make **decisions** on behalf of the council.

That does not preclude councillors from having, or expressing, their own views. But they must be prepared, and be seen to be prepared, to consider all the evidence and arguments before a collective decision of the council can be made. In order to do this it is perfectly valid for councillors to question and research relevant information. It is also perfectly legitimate for a councillor to be *predisposed to a particular outcome on the basis of their support of general policy*. Decision making can be delegated to a committee (e.g. Planning Committee) or group of councillors, or to an officer (i.e. the Clerk) of the council, but **not** to an individual councillor, not even the Chairman.

The council represents and serves the whole community and balances the needs of different elements of the community to get the best result. Frequently it has the difficult task of deciding what that best result might be.

The chairman is elected by the Council on an annual basis and is in a position of authority; his/her post is recognised in law. He/she is in charge at meetings and is responsible for ensuring that effective and lawful decisions are taken and will take advice from the Clerk on this. The chairman is often seen as the public face of the council. They may represent and speak on behalf of the council but by law cannot make a formal **decision** on behalf of the council.

The Parish Clerk is also a position recognised in law – the Clerk is **not** just a minutes clerk or a secretary! – and covers a very wide range of duties, including representing the council when dealing with the public, other statutory bodies, organisations and the media. They are **employed by the Council** to implement the decisions of the Council and to carry out all administrative functions in relation to its powers and duties. The council is responsible for making decisions and the Clerk takes instructions from the council **as a body**; but is not answerable to any individual councillor – *not even the chairman*.

The Clerk is the "**Proper Officer**" of the council, and responsible in law for formal acts. They have a statutory duty to carry out certain functions, and in particular to serve or issue all the notifications required by law, for example notices regarding vacancies on the council. The council can legally delegate decision making to the Clerk, as an **objective professional**, whose **independence** allows them to act on behalf of the council. In this capacity, they also have a responsibility to operate and implement the adopted policies of the council. They also provide **professional advice** to the council on whether decisions are lawful and ways in which they can be implemented and as "**Responsible Financial Officer**" have responsibility for financial administration and procedures, ensuring compliance with legislation and audit regulations.

David Allen

As explained opposite, Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish Council is independent of the ecclesiastical parish of Salehurst but we are happy to publicise this for them as it is an important part of our community.

PARISH CHURCH MINISTRY COSTS - Between 2004 and 2007, the generous support of many local people and organisations as well as grants from English Heritage and other bodies, enabled us to complete a major conservation programme at St Mary's. It became clear at the time that many people were not aware how the annual costs of our parish church are funded.

The short answer is that the congregation and those who support St Mary's are largely responsible. Our principal revenue comes from the weekly donations at Sunday services, currently about £20,000 a year. Fees for weddings and funerals, income from limited investments and the amount raised at the Christmas Market add about another £9,000.

From these total receipts we pay our annual contribution to the Diocese (the Parish Ministry Costs, sometimes referred to as the Diocesan quota) – which in 2010 will be over £28,000. Whilst this may seem a lot, the diocese pays the vicar's stipend and also meets the costs of housing, training, pension and working expenses. For 2009 the Diocese estimates that a typical incumbent actually costs about £48,000 by the time these other figures are added. For our parish the shortfall between what we pay the Diocese and what it costs to run St Mary's (in effect, the subsidy) is at the rate of 30%. There are many parishes in the Deanery who require a larger subsidy; in fact, there is only one which manages to pay virtually their full ministry costs.

There are, of course, other expenses of running our parish church; charitable giving, heating, lighting, maintenance of church and churchyard and incidental expenses etc. The loyal support of many parishioners who give their time freely to clean the church and maintain the churchyard has kept these running costs as low as possible. However, we have not always been able to balance our budget and have had to dip into our limited reserves - in the last two years, at the rate of £3,000 a year.

There is no doubt that, by paying our share of parish ministry costs each year we have been allowed to appoint a priest just for St Mary's, rather than having to share a priest with another local parish or parishes. The message is clear; if we hope to retain a vicar just for Salehurst and Robertsbridge we have to remain financially solvent.

However hard it is to accept, at a time of financial pressures arising from the recession, we do need to increase our regular donations to the church and to make the maximum use of Gift Aid that allows us to claim from the Chancellor of the Exchequer a further 28% on donations made by taxpayers. If you already make regular Gift Aided donations, please help us by increasing your giving. If you regularly put cash in the collection, please at least consider talking to a Churchwarden about Gift Aid.

Barry Longmuir – Church Warden

Bishop's Meadow – next steps

Following the end of the lease for Neil Barden to use the bottom part of Bishops Meadow for his wood business, we hope the area will be open to the public from May.

Neil's 15 year agreement, made with Rother District Council, came to an end in September 2009. He has been clearing the yard through the winter and when ground conditions permit the area will be landscaped.

The whole area was given to the community by the developers of Mill Rise, to be used as **Public Open Space**, and the Parish Council took over management of the main Bishops Meadow field 12 years ago. The plan for the rest of the field, previously used by Neil for wood storage, is to build a bund and fence across the existing entrance to the yard. This means there will still be one entrance to the meadow, at the current point. It will then be possible to turn left down in to the new area, along the edge of the railway line, and join up with the Licensed footpath that goes along the edge of the Darvell Community land. Depending on the weather and how soon the grass seed takes, the Parish Council hopes the new area will be open to the public in May.

Tamara Strapp

